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# Drawing and the score.

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## 14. Drawing and the Score

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Artistic Creativity and its relationship with artistic research (thus) becomes a paradigm in Agamben's sense of the word (1999), as constituting and making intelligible those aspects of human experience that are concerned with *managing our freedom as human beings*.

Coessens, Douglas and Crispin 2009, 180 [own emphasis]

Traditionally a score in Western classical music has ensured the music's presentation and replication to an audience. Drawings as blueprints in architecture/engineering ensure that designs are translated into real structures in ways that are more or less faithful to the designer's intention and state of the art of technical knowledge. Viewed culturally, both designer and composer are clearly flagged as originators of the work. Underpinning these traditional forms of "score" or "drawing" is the belief that both can be performed more or less literally. This belief and associated practices secure their value as artefacts to society.

However artists tend to challenge fixed meaning and value. An artist views conventions as "plastic," as having a potential for infinite variability. A creative artist establishes a tension, dissonance even, between what is expected of artworks and what is actually presented to audiences.

One artistic ruse is to stray out of the territory of a particular medium, smuggling concepts and practices from other artforms to "make the break." It is commonplace to observe music's referencing of the graphic and the visual arts' referencing of time and music. It is not surprising to learn that score, notation and drawing share a root in the eleventh-century Norse word "skor," meaning to score, notch or scratch. While notation and drawing have acquired a more specialised meaning as a system of graphic symbols used in particular contexts, they also spill over into the non-specialised and quotidian: mark making, direction finding, delineation, framing or forming connections. These meanings bridge lay, legal and artistic domains.

This chapter draws on the experiences of artists across the domains of music and the visual. The first part briefly examines perceptions of the score by two musicians—Paulo de Assis and Juan Parra Cancino. De Assis is a classical pianist; Cancino, a composer/performer working within the digital. They offer perspectives of a performer and a composer respectively. It is striking how both articulate the importance of the visual/spatial in their particular experiences of music-making. The second, larger section examines a particular work of a visual artist, John Latham, in relation to score—*Time-Based Roller with Graphic Score* (1987) (Flat Time House

collection). In this work, time, imagined through music, in particular through “score,” is articulated by means of a material object in which “score” is a metaphor, incorporating the viewer “as performer” actively within the work, embodying time. The insights gathered from these examples are used to examine my own collaborative experimental art project, *Calendar Variations*, 2010–present.

The point of this small handful of examples is to observe in particular situations what happens when an artist transposes concepts of drawing and notation across the borders of artforms. Is it possible that these tactics and their results can inform in very particular ways those “experiences that are concerned with managing freedom”? These are a few of many possible examples from the mid-twentieth century onwards in which the notion of “the score” becomes a very particular means to introduce time into the domain of the visual/spatial and, conversely, space and the graphic into time-based media. For example, George Brecht (Robinson 2005), as both musician and visual artist, was in fact one of the first experimental artists in twentieth-century USA (working alongside Allan Kaprow and under the influence of John Cage) to introduce score into the visual domain, effectively establishing a new kind of protocol for artistic experience.

*Three Aqueous Events*

- ice
- water
- steam

(August 1961)

No action is actually involved other than within the imagination, prompted by the sequence of words and their implied transition/movement through three states of matter. Brecht’s score cues our interaction, structuring time and space into the potential for an event. It is an event within our imagination. The score prepares us to take this imaginary action and move in a new direction.

Paulo de Assis, pianist and musicologist<sup>1</sup>:

I started working with Nono almost twenty years ago. ... At the beginning I had an approach as a traditional interpretive performer. There was a score, and I was reading the score in a mimetic way, trying to realise what was there. At a certain moment I arrived at a couple of problems—a couple of questions—that could not be answered through a normal reading of the score. I felt strongly that I wanted to see the original sketches—to see the manuscripts.

One of the fascinating things when you work with sketches is that, in a certain way, we can *see* or, at least, we have the impression that we are seeing the thoughts of the composer at the stage of the working process. This is especially the case, I believe, in Beethoven’s sketches and in Nono’s sketches. Both composers used a large number of sketches. They needed them. They wrote and rewrote the same passages and the same pieces.

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<sup>1</sup> Paulo de Assis is a pianist and musicologist, Senior Research Fellow at the Orpheus Research Centre in Music (ORCiM), Ghent, Belgium and Research Fellow in Music at the University Nova of Lisbon. The quoted material is a transcript of an interview conducted with the author at ORCiM in July 2009 at ORCiM.

Nono, for example, also used a lot of colour and graphic visualisation of the music. Furthermore, this graphic visualisation is very often the origin of the piece. Nono goes from this origin as sketch to slowly defining the score. This yields a completely different kind of information for the performer that you could not get out of the printed version of the final score. The graphic score is the result of a complex process where different kinds of visualising a musical object are coming together, closing, and defining new objects. For me it would be impossible now to think of this piece without remembering, in my mind, all those beautiful pictures that Luigi Nono drew when he was composing the piece."

What might we understand about the spatial/temporal qualities of notation from this articulation?

In this particular instance—De Assis' exploration of Luigi Nono—the visual is a strong sensory presence: the musician "sees" and "reads." The graphic sketch gives the work particularity, a character, the quality of emerging, being in formation rather than formed. The graphic quality of the sketch prompts development. It becomes the means to go somewhere with the work—as De Assis says, "a complex process where different kinds of visualising a musical object are coming together, closing, and defining new objects." Freedom and constraint are differently balanced in the sketch than in a printed score. The latter indicates both what the music sounds like and also what the performer should do. By looking at the musical sketch, De Assis suggests, we are able to "see" the thought processes of the composer in the act of composing, "at the stage of the working process," in ways that shift the performer's role from interpretation to creation.

At the same time De Assis lays out a paradox. These new insights are dependent upon getting closer to the thoughts and actions of the composer at the moment of origination, by suspending individuality rather than imposing the personality/character of the performer in ways that might distance him/herself from that origin.

Interestingly, "sketch" is a word that we use in both drawing and music to denote an act/moment of originating a new artistic idea. The sketch can be held in one's imagination. It is vivid: "it would be impossible now to think of this piece without remembering, in my mind, all those beautiful pictures..." In other words, the performer's imagination is gripped, head and heart. It is perhaps this catharsis that opens up the performer's role to deeper levels of creative response and potential responsibility.

Juan Parra Cancino<sup>2</sup> offers another view that emerges from a different set of research concerns. Where De Assis focuses on a spectrum of approaches—interpretation /creation as a pianist—Cancino is a composer challenged by the lack of specialisation within the computer as instrument.

My research considers how can we describe the performance practice of an instrument that does not exist and how can we take this limitation and connect the performance practice of this non-existent instrument with performance practices of traditional musical instruments. I look at elements like physical gestures, or a concert situation, or interactivity—social interaction between musicians and the whole idea of the score—as the outcome of a collaborative process instead of the starting point for a collaborative process. ... I use graphic notation as a very basic way of saying, "OK,

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<sup>2</sup> Juan Parra Cancino is a composer and fellow of Orpheus Research Centre in Music (ORCIM). The quoted material is a transcript of an interview with the author conducted at ORCiM in July 2009.

we will work together; we will make a piece—but what we want is to have different interpretations of one single score.”

In Cancino’s work, the graphic presents an invitation for something to happen, rather than a set of instructions to the performers for what will happen, a blueprint. An “invitation” is a metaphor that has implications for how one might act in response. This creative proposition places in tension all aspects of music making: the physical (gestures), social/cultural mores of the concert hall and expectations and knowledge of the audience, as well the interpersonal—the creative potential of one musician working with another. The score is at the fulcrum.

What quality of experience does this produce? Mieko Kanno, violinist, has worked collaboratively with Cancino<sup>3</sup>:

We go into the room, connect everything together, test everything together, improvise a little bit. We know what would work nicely and what would not work and then the balance—just trying out many different combinations of things, talking about how we want to shape sounds so that it can have a certain visual reference. It can realise a certain visual shape. Let’s say there is a triangular shape. What kind of possibilities are there out there for us to communicate that sound using either our playing techniques or the sound that comes out of it, or the processing the computer is doing? We independently have different ideas, but at the same time, because we are working as a duo, between us it has to be communicative. It has to be clear without using words because once we start describing everything we are no longer listening to each other. We are not musically communicating in that sense.

Kanno, in this interview at ORCiM in 2009, describes an interplay between the visual and the musical from the perspective of the performer. The score encourages composer and performer to shape music, drawing from the visual as a source and giving music shape as a result. The graphic that Cancino presents invites the possibility of having different ideas and also gives permission to explore these ideas. It does not predetermine the musician’s or composer’s passage through the material. The energy driving the process is pleasure in the doing, the love of music-making and the desire to communicate well through music. This process, with its freedoms and constraints, challenges knowledge and experience, giving energy to pose new and better questions. Kanno articulates a starting point in deep knowledge—“we know what would work and what would not work”. That deep knowledge leads to communicability. It is a foundational principle that allows for clarity as a priority between players and with the audience.

It would appear from these experiences that the presence of a graphic element in composition interrupts the linearity of relations between composer/performer, intercepts the conventions of “reading in a mimetic way,” opening up a spatial dimension. Within the newly configured space, composer and performer re-invent their roles and creative responsibilities, distributing these differently in relation to time and process. A performer (De Assis) exhausts the creative possibilities of a particular score and goes back in time to a point of origin. In so doing he reworks the piece in his imagination, recovers creative energy by discovering the graphic as a point from which to move and develop differently. A composer (Cancino) opens his musical ideas to multiple possible interpretations, inviting in the performer (Kanno) to

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<sup>3</sup> Mieko Kanno, violinist, is Head of Strings at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. She was a Research Fellow with ORCiM in 2008-10.

be part of the generation of a piece that confronts the lack of specialisation of the composer's instrument, the computer, by constraining this seemingly infinite potential by means of a graphic.

What happens in the relation between score and the visual arts?

## The Incidental person

**John Latham**

Imagine a room—a normal sized sitting room sparsely furnished. Imagine a tall, thin, elderly man—an artist, well respected by other artists and largely ignored for much of his life by the establishment. He is now celebrated as an important figure internationally. It is a Saturday afternoon late in 2004. The room is in a house in Peckham in South London, called *Flat Time House*. To the right of the chair on which the artist sits is a large canvas suspended from a roller, an improvised roller blind. The work is called *Time-Base Roller with Graphic Score (1987)*( see figure 1).



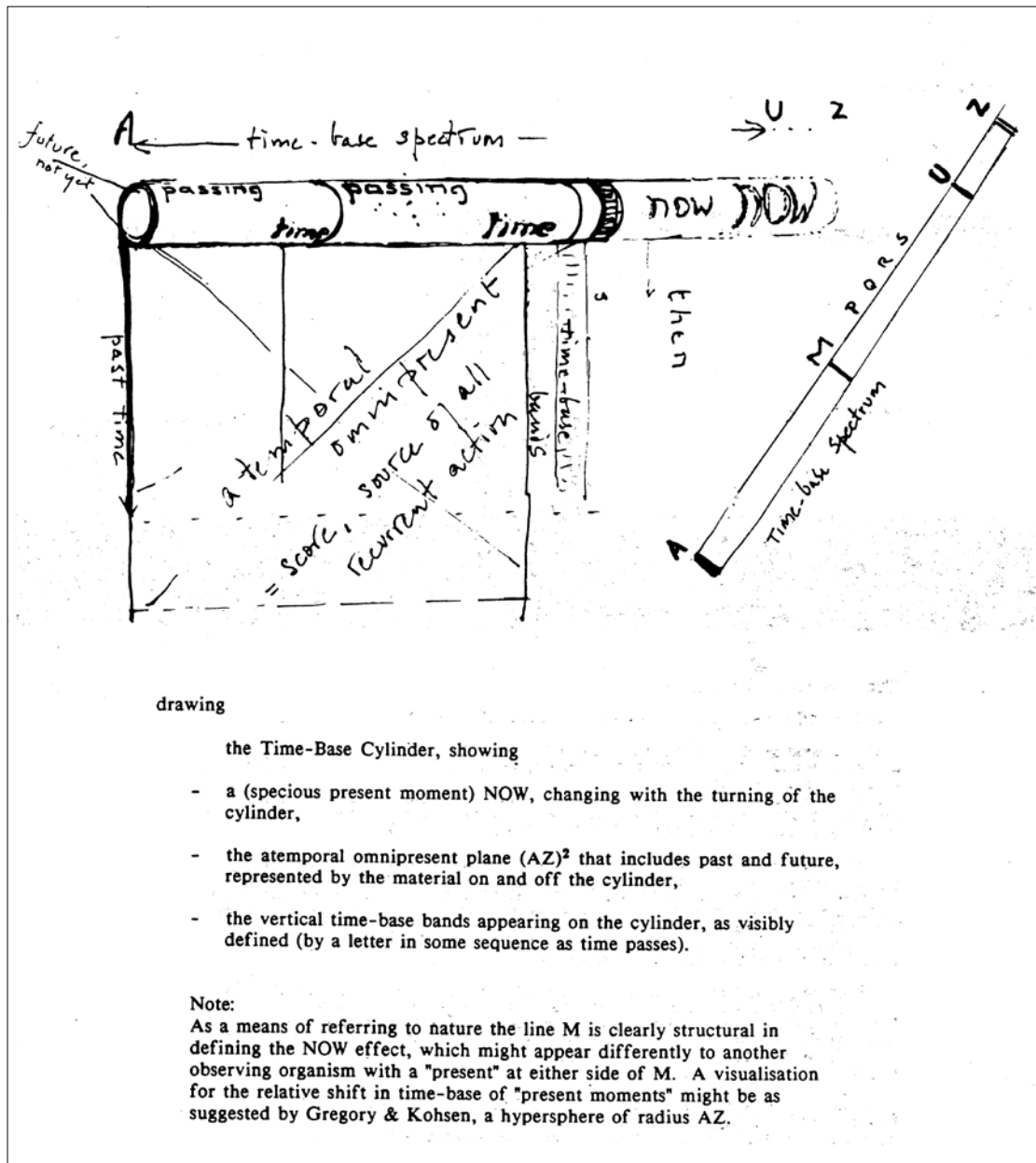
**Figure 1.** *Time-Base Roller with Graphic Score, 1987 (with Basic T Diagram on left).* Canvas, electric motor operating metal bar, wood, graphite. Photo Ken Adlard. Courtesy the John Latham Foundation.

Late in 2004, I visited John Latham in his studio and home on the invitation of his wife, Barbara Steveni. Latham articulated his theory of time. The following narrative is a reconstruction, drawing on this experience as well as secondary documentation from the John Latham Foundation and Furlong 2005.

The artist explains:

All time can be represented by the length and width of a flat canvas. Along the top of the roller, time is divided into intervals that mirror the way the human mind imagines time. A marks an event of the shortest duration, a “least event” (like quarks in quantum physics). M marks the present of an individual. P marks an event in human time in terms of one generation of a human being (approximately 30 years). Q marks “the boundary of reason” or society and its rules, the rational/structural. RST marks intuition and conscience, the domain of art; STU, the domain of truth; and U, the time base of the whole universe. [Note at this point how Latham merges and paces those intervals referencing the domain of art, the domain of truth and the universal.]

The long canvas is wound round the roller, which is operated by an electrical switch. As the barrel turns, more of the canvas is unwound until a whole length is unfurled. The whole represents an entire universe understood “timelessly like a musical score.” Furled or partially furled, most of the canvas is obscured from view most of the time, rolled up or only visible at the top. The backside is reality. The narrow visible strip that we can actually see on the roller is the now. The square produced by the co-ordinates of M-horizontal/M-vertical, P-horizontal/P-vertical, etc., is an “atemporal omnipresence from which all events are ordered” (see figure 2).

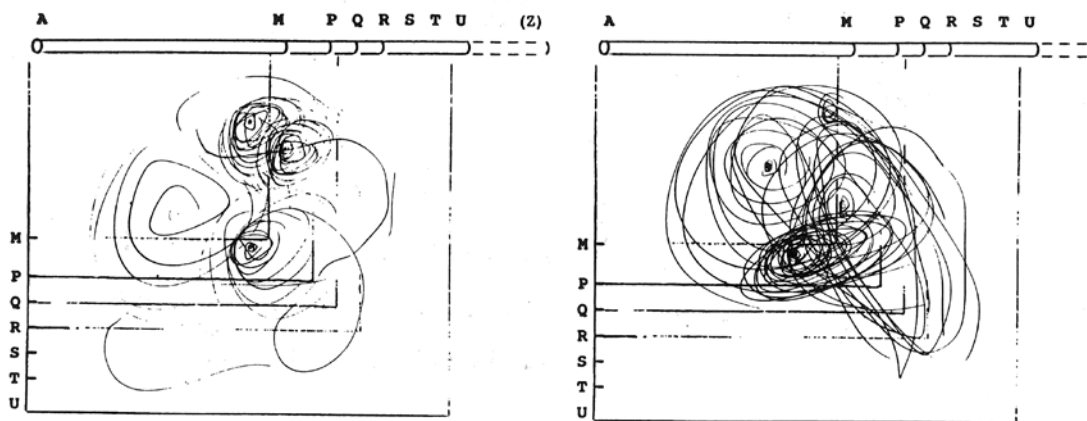


**Figure 2.** The time-base cylinder (Latham 1991, 111). © Image courtesy of Modern Art Oxford.

The artist believed that time and event were primary. Objects in the world are mere traces of events. There are no phenomena without time but there are many phenomena without space. The score is effectively a generative metaphor of time (see figure 3).

This work might be interpreted as follows: As human beings, and the only species perhaps to have this capability, we can cast our imagination back and forth but always from a point in the present. This interpenetration of past, present, future gives form to how we act in the world. We can imagine timescales beyond what we will ever experience in a single life. Our imaginings are structured by rules of society within which we locate ourselves as individuals, creatively and productively. The rational is mediated through sensibilities such as conscience, intuition, the artistic and poetic, taking us into new domains—truth, the universal.





**Figure 3.** The roller AU and (AU squared)—Person/Object relatedness (Latham 1991, 116)  
© Image courtesy of Modern Art Oxford.

This artwork shares many but not all of the visual, formal and functional qualities of a score. It adopts the conventions of linear organisation using parallel lines in relation to symbols that create points of location within a geometric space. Duration is represented both in a horizontal reading from left to right and in a vertical dimension, allowing a two-dimensional space to open up and contain interim events at different scales. The vertical therefore manifests a visual/spatial function rather than the musical function of denoting pitch. Space/material/concept establish a tension between values of time and values of space: Which should call our attention in the artwork? Like a score by George Brecht, it cues an event the precise “rhythms,” “timbres” and “pitches” of which are deliberately unspecified. We inhabit the space. We make the work with our experience.

John Latham understood his time/event theory in terms of music and of drawing. In drawing, a point in space can represent a point of mobility, a point from which to move, a zero point. This moment is potent. It has a prehistory. The score, while it is not heard as sound, exists as a possibility. It is in a sense “timeless.” Once sounded, the score enters experience by controlling time (frequencies, rhythms, and pause lengths), forming experience. Latham’s way of imagining time in terms of score rehearses the principles of graphic exploration developed by Paul Klee, in which time in terms of movement and process are privileged. In a similar way, Latham believed, the composer creates a musical idea. At the outset there is a score as an initial impulse to gather an audience to come together within a new event and listen. They listen for a duration of thirty minutes or so. The musical idea unfolds in real time through complex frequencies. Latham observed that in the minds of the audience, the score does not exist in the moment of the performance. It must be assumed. It is effectively “tucked away in a drawer” (Furlong 2005 online transcript). Likewise Latham’s score can be committed to memory and taken into everyday experience, becoming something to work with, a means by which events in a single life become connected and located in relation to each other and beyond. To work with the score, to create with it, we need to have made an investment in understanding it, mastering and interpreting its specificity, its constraints, its severity.

What are the implications of this transposition between the visual and spatial?

The artist’s intention and unfolding of the work is revealing. With his time/event theory, Latham was seeking to overcome the fragmentation in knowledge

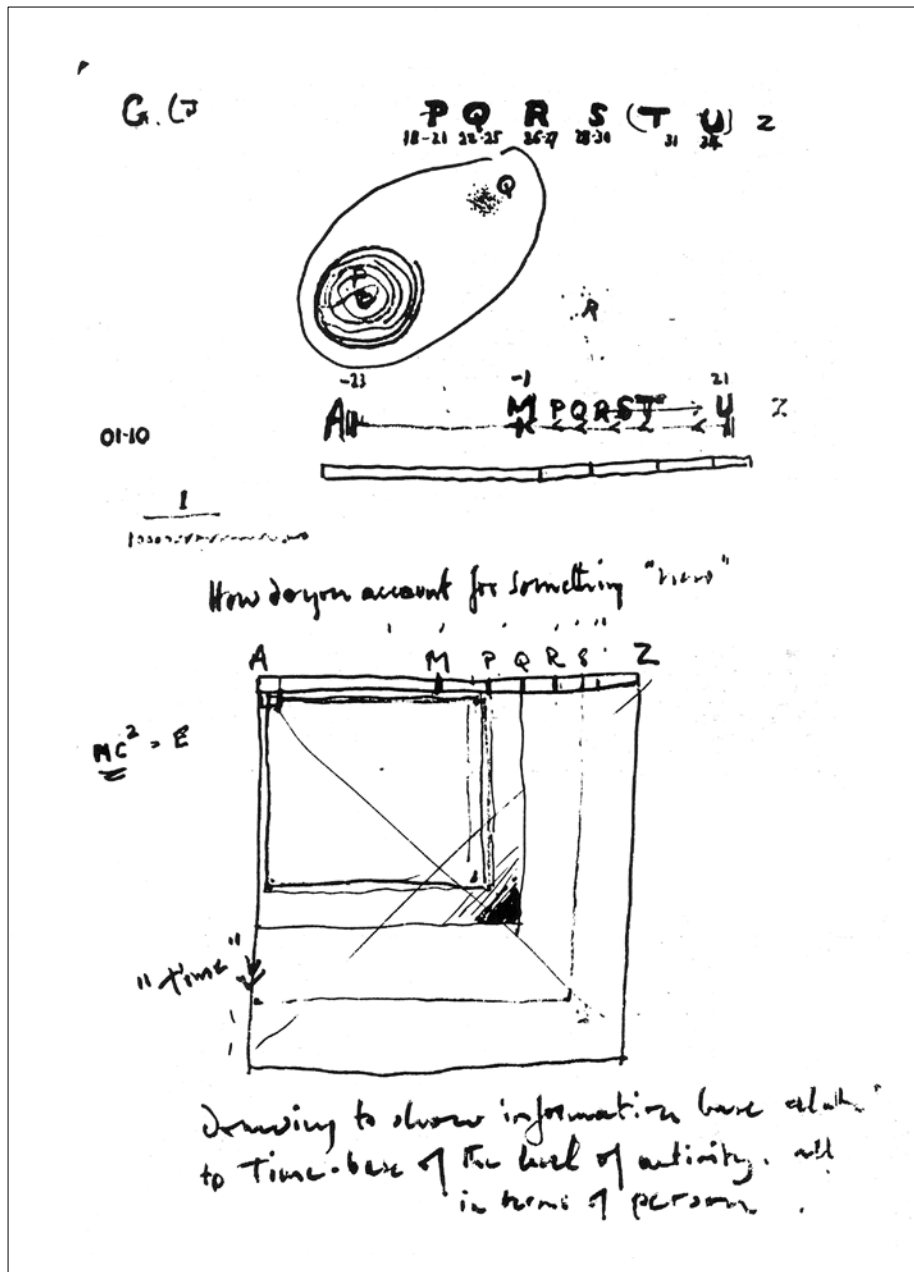
that occurs over time. This fragmentation can be experienced in the emergence of different ideologies, different belief systems, divisions between knowledge in art and science and within the sciences themselves. Latham articulates an image of a struggle to bridge difference as differences pull apart. He creates an image and artefact in *Time-Base Roller with Graphic Score* (1987) that presents another way of thinking about time and experience—a single plane that is seemingly endless.

In fact Latham used his score (and the theory of flat time that it represents) to inform his understanding of the role of the artist in society. The human being is instinctive as well as having intellectual power, a rational being. Reflective and intuitive aspects both come together within original thought. The artist originates by observing and acting in the world. Latham named the artist an “incidental person,” occurring in time and space in ways that extend beyond physical bodily presence. An artist is uniquely placed to work within the local and the specific while simultaneously grasping the meaning and implications for action within different frames of reference as mapped in the score. Such artists can think through the long-term implications of their actions, whereas most areas of production or service are expedient. Artists are capable of working across hierarchies, social groupings, barriers of discipline, belief and specialism, through dialogue or improvisation.

These understandings were brought to test within the Artist Placement Group (APG) that Latham and Steveni developed in the early 1970s. Artists were placed within industry or government, including British Steel and the then-Scottish Office. Over a three-month period they negotiated the nature of their work and relations. Latham’s intellectual underpinning of these placements offered a framework—a kind of score that critiques the institutional—that structured expectations in ways that allowed the artists to act freely within highly regulated institutional contexts. The effect was to stimulate new ways of thinking within the routine (Douglas 2009).

## **Conclusion**

The research that drives this paper began with a commonplace observation: music draws on the visual and vice versa. This led me to seek out examples of artists in both media whose work changes or is changed by such cross-media interventions. Many of these reference both drawing and the score. I was curious to know how such interventions were achieved and to what effect. These questions in turn revealed a tension between the cultural constructions through which activities of score-making and drawing secure value. By challenging assumed values, acting creatively with the material to hand, the artist opens up new possibilities for experience. In so doing, I believe, the artist constitutes and makes intelligible in very particular, grounded ways how, as human beings, we manage freedom.



**Figure 4.** Working drawings for *Time based Roller with Graphic Score* 1987 in Latham (1991, 117). © Image courtesy of Modern Art Oxford.

Taking Latham's *Time based Roller with Graphic Score* 1987 as an example, we experience a reconfiguring of the dynamic of artist/work/audience. Score—as a familiar construct within the domain of music—frames this structure in a particular and thoughtful way. What occurs is neither a musical score nor a drawing, though the conventions of both are present and active. By admitting a tension between the one and the other a new form emerges that impacts on all stages of the work: conception, making, presentation and reception, looping these activities across and between author/audience. This score is not a representation of what already exists but rather a movement towards an outcome that has the potential to exist (see Figure 4). The balancing between determined and indeterminate elements tilts our perception towards the world of immediate experience. It heightens that experience. This is a quality that is shared with George Brecht, Allan Kaprow, John Cage and others

working a decade or so earlier than Latham. Their aims and activities opened up the visual/musical fields to increasing the potential for indeterminacy through experimentation underpinned by significant critical discourse (Kaprow's *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, George Brecht's *Notebooks*, Cage's essays on *Composition as Process*, to name a few). They were named "research artists" for good reason.

Finally my aim is to take these insights and the deep mining of particular works into establishing /rethinking the nature of artistic experimentation in research. In a recent project, *Calendar Variations 2010-11*, I worked with a group of artist-researchers enacting one of Allan Kaprow's scores, *Calendar* (1971) (Kaprow 2003). The work challenged this diverse artistic research group to respond to the score both individually and as a group. The emergent body of work forms the content of an analysis of improvisation, to be developed with Kathleen Coessens in future. Improvisation has been a key concept throughout my artistic practice and research career, and *Calendar Variations* is managed through the understandings that have emerged as a result.

What is important in this particular project is to rethink the interrelationship between activities such as drawing and walking, and shifts in aesthetic understandings of art-making, feeding these insights back into the practice. The enactment of Kaprow's score is not an historical exercise but an opportunity to create within a context, as sole author and as a shared, social experience that acknowledges Kaprow's intentions for his scores and the variability that occurs when the score engages a new, different context (Kelley 2004). The artists-researchers who participated in *Calendar Variations* are well developed in their rethinking of artist, artwork, audience relationships. They have a perspective on art-making that is outwardly focused into the fields of ecology, farming, intercultural relations, public communication. This extended, expanded field of art-practice demands that we think through form-making in new ways, with the same intellectual rigor and creative intensity as is evident in Latham, among others, not least to avoid becoming consumed by discourses that are predominantly social, economic or political.

Understanding art-making as an incidence of managing freedom draws out a critical perspective that focuses on process and dynamic relations, with a potential for new possibilities for the forms themselves as well as how we understand them. In the final result we carry the responsibility as artists to keep in tension how we act and how we think and in so doing to retain the fresh and unexpected nature of the work.

A composer knows his works as a woodsman knows a path he has traced and retraced, while a listener is confronted by the same work as one is in the woods by a plant he has never seen before. (Cage 1971, 7)

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